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## COMMUNICATIONS

**FLEXIBILITY CLAUSES IN AGREEMENTS IN THE PRINTING INDUSTRY.** In her article on "American Minimum Wage Laws at Work," published in the *AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW* for December, 1919, Dorothy W. Douglas points out that "during a period of rapidly changing prices such as we have had ever since our American wage laws went into effect it takes a very short time for a rate to become antiquated." In this article Mrs. Douglas offers the very valuable suggestion that for specific periods of a year or so the minimum wage commissions be given *ad interim* power to revise existing rates, which could be done in accordance with the cost of living index numbers issued by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In this connection it is interesting to note the introduction of flexibility clauses in a number of collective agreements in the printing industry. This effort to stabilize contracts is in accordance with the labor policies adopted by the Joint Industrial Conference Council, which represents employers' associations, closed shop divisions, and employers in the allied printing trades unions. The cardinal points of this labor policy include the following statements:

1. That the industry frankly recognize the cost of living as compared to 1914, as the basic factor in wage adjustments.
2. Industry to pay at least a reasonable living wage; scales below this to be adjusted in frank recognition of the basic principle involved.
3. That, when not in conflict with the existing laws of a constituent body, local contracts be for a period not less than three years, and include a clause providing for annual readjustments of wages based upon cost of living, as determined by authorities jointly agreed upon (and upon the economic conditions of the industry at the time of readjustment).

Three such clauses providing for changes in the wage scale in conformity with the cost of living in particular or business conditions in general may be noted.

An agreement now in force between the Memphis Typographical Union (No. 11) and the Employing Printers' Committee includes such a clause, which, however, does not stipulate the definite period of the change. Following is the clause:

It is agreed that should any radical change in business conditions or the cost of living occur during the life of this Agreement after two years from its signature, either side may open discussion as to a revision of same; provided, said Agreement shall remain in full force and effect unless a change is mutually agreed to.

A clause in the agreement between the Franklin Typothetae of Chicago and the local unions determines a six-month period:

Unless it can be shown by the cost of living figures of the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics, that during the six months period from the date this contract is effected and at intervals of six months thereafter, the cost of living has increased 5 per cent or more, then and then only shall the officers of the Unions herein represented, have the right to ask for a further readjustment of the wage scales herein set forth, provided, that the percentage of increase shall apply only to the 1914 scales, the same basis as has been used to work out present scales, as embodied in this agreement, and further provided, that should the cost of living for one of the six months periods decrease by an amount equal to or exceeding the increases, then any increases above the amount now granted in this agreement may be decreased in the same proportion, provided that no figures shall reduce the scales below those set forth in this agreement.

Finally, a clause contained in the existing agreement between the Typographical Union and the local Typothetae of Tacoma arranges for quarterly readjustments:

It is hereby agreed between the undersigned that the scale of wages heretofore existing under a certain contract entered into by us on December 23, 1914, is to be as follows:

1st. That the scale of wages from and after this date is to be based on the comparative average retail prices of the principal articles of food as compiled by the United States Department of Labor as published in the *Monthly Labor Review*.

2nd. That up to June 30, 1919, the scale of wages is to be \$6.50 for floormen per day of eight hours and \$7.50 for machinist operators and \$7.00 for caster men per day of seven hours based on the prices set forth for the City of Seattle, Wash. for December 15, 1918, as published on page 100 of the *Monthly Labor Review* for February, 1919.

3rd. That said scale of wages is to be automatically increased or decreased without further conference beginning with the first Saturdays of January, April, July, and October, in the same percentum as the average prices have increased or decreased as shown by the most recent issue available of the said *Monthly Labor Review*, provided that said increase or decrease shall be made in multiples of 5 per cent using that multiple that comes nearest to the percentum of change in the aforesaid prices.

4th. Should the prices published in the said *Monthly Labor Review* fail to include the City of Seattle, then those for the next nearest city to Tacoma that are shown shall be used.

5th. Should the Department of Labor make a change in their standard list of principal articles of food, only such items as appear in the new list shall be used, as also appear in the list heretofore mentioned.

6th. That this agreement is to be retroactive to January 1st.

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